

School-Based EFL Curriculum Implementation in Indonesian Primary Schools: A Perspective of Bernstein's Pedagogic Device

by Iskandar Iskandar

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Title

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School-Based EFL Curriculum Implementation in Indonesian Primary Schools:
A Perspective of Bernstein's Pedagogic Device

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Abstract

Despite the emergent of the Indonesian 2013 curriculum, the 2006 curriculum which is widely known as KTSP is still implemented nationwide. This qualitative study was aimed at investigating Indonesian primary EFL teachers' understanding of and attitude towards the Indonesian National Standards of Education (NS) which comprise of Content Standards (CS), Process Standards (PS), and Graduate Competency Standards (GCS) as frameworks for constructing KTSP. The NS contains only general curriculum guidelines for all school subjects from primary to secondary schools. Teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards the NS determine the way they interpret and translate the policies of the standards into their specific school contexts. By employing ethnographic interviewing technique, the study revealed that teachers have sufficient knowledge of the underpinning principles and the features of the NS. In terms of attitudes, the study showed that most teachers adhered to the NS; yet by two distinctive reasons: interactive and coercive. Some others preferred adaptation, and yet a few of them articulated their incompatibility with the NS. Through classroom observation, practice of adaptation was evident. Bernstein's theory of pedagogic device signifies these teachers' adaptation to the NS as an act of recontextualization.

Key Words: *KTSP, teachers' understandings, teachers' attitudes, Bernstein's pedagogic device*

Introduction

Current Indonesian curriculum policy adopts the notion of partnership (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001); advocating the integration of top-down and bottom-up strategies of innovation. This new genre of curriculum policy is established through the effectuation of National Standards of Education (NS) which contain only general curriculum guidelines for school subjects from primary to secondary schools. Teachers need to have an understanding of what is intended by the NS when they construct their school-based curriculum which is known as KTSP. Teachers' attitudes is another factor that influences the success of innovation (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Markee, 1993). If teachers' views are incompatible with an innovation, it is likely that they will be resistant to it (Brown, 1980; Haney, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 1996; Levitt, 2001). In terms of the NS, teachers' resistance means they may not use the NS as their guideline in constructing their KTSP. These two factors, among others, determine the way they interpret and translate the policies of the standards into their specific contexts. This study was aimed at investigating primary EFL teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards the NS as the framework for the making of their KTSP in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia.

Literature Review

Research has revealed that the way curriculum is implemented does not always reflect what curriculum designers intended (Smith & Southerland, 2007). Among the factors that make it difficult to implement curriculum innovation are teachers' understandings, their background training or educational background, lack of guidance, and the influence of textbooks. Of these factors, teachers' understandings play a significant role in the degree of implementation of innovation. Cheung and Wong (2012) in their study also found that one of factors affecting the implementation of curriculum reform in Hong Kong is the inadequate teachers' understanding of the reform (p. 39). Carless (1998) advocated that in order for teachers to successfully implement an innovation, they need to understand both the theoretical principles and the classroom application of that innovation

Teachers' attitudes may also impact on the implementation of innovation. According to Kennedy and Kennedy (1996, p. 351), the implementation of change in classrooms requires changes in both teacher and student behaviour. Teachers' attitudes play a part in this behaviour (Carless, 1998). When their attitudes are compatible with a proposed innovation, the implementation of the innovation is likely to harvest a positive result. Ultimately, teachers determine the fate of a curriculum innovation (Ball, 1994). Teachers' view about curriculum regulates their practice, and will affect how they decide the content of curriculum (Kable, 2001).

Conceptual Framework

In Indonesian context, the nature of political discourse can be exemplified by who has authority to make curriculum policy, for what intention, and under what conditions. Two sets of actors are involved in this respect, government officials/agents and individual teachers/group of teachers. Each of these sides use their power to control the curriculum implementation by selecting the contents of subjects, sequencing knowledge based on their expertise, managing the instruction, and imposing pedagogic strategy in the classroom. To illuminate the practice of such curriculum implementation, Bernstein's theoretical framework, the pedagogic device (1990, 1996, 2000), was adopted in this study.

According to Bernstein (1996), there are three sets of hierarchical rules that govern school instruction, namely distributive, recontextualizing, and evaluative (cited in Wright & Froehlich, 2012, p. 215). Distributive rules generate knowledge standards. In the context of this study, knowledge standardization is conducted by setting the NS to be used by teachers in constructing their KTSP. At this stage, the main actors are the government officials or agents. Recontextualizing rules is the derivation of the distributive rules in which knowledge standards represented by the NS is connected to its transmission through classroom interactions. Therefore, the NS is removed from its original form and turned into another form: the school-based curriculum for English subject at school. Teachers are the actors at this stage. Evaluative rules operate at two sides of actors. At government's side, the evaluative rules are employed by revising the NS and or by making additional curricular choices. At teachers' side, the evaluative rules are employed by highlighting what is or is not worthy for students to learn. Therefore, it is anticipated that teachers may not decide the content of the curriculum equally in their

pedagogic practice. In light with this kind of discourse, it is likely that 'potential discursive gap' (Bernstein, 1996, p.30) will take place.

Methods

This qualitative study employed ethnographic interviewing technique (Bauman & Adair, 1992), and classroom observation to collect data. Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was employed to analyse teachers' responses to the interview questions, and has been categorized into themes. Classroom observation was aimed at finding evidence of what the teachers reported they practiced in their EFL teaching. The participants of the interview study were eleven primary EFL teachers of Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Classroom observation involved other four primary EFL teachers from the province.

Findings

The interview revealed that teachers generally acknowledged the underpinning of the NS. Some teachers described some points that they believe to be parts of the principles underpinning the NS; that the NS is enacted through an active, creative, effective, and fun teaching learning process; that the NS suggests a multi strategy approach; that the curriculum set by the schools should integrate the national and regional potencies into the contents of their teaching materials. Of the substance of the NS, the CS containing standard of competencies and basic competencies were considered to be the most important by the majority of interviewed teachers. The reason was that teachers use them to construct a syllabus and develop their lesson plans. In terms of flexibility, the majority of teachers affirmed that the NS is flexible, which enables them to construct their school curriculum based on their school's condition and environment. The majority of them, however, found that the framework is too general. This is not surprising, since the NS consists of three separate national standards: CS, PS, and GCS. This circumstance creates confusion for teachers. The interviewed teachers claimed that the competence standard as the basis for syllabus construction is too difficult for primary school students. They also claimed that the objectives set in the GCS are too difficult to achieve.

In terms of teachers' attitudes, some of the interviewed teachers said the NS is good enough as a guideline for the construction of their school curriculum. They noted that the NS is informative, and very satisfactory. A few teachers argued that it is a must

for them to refer to the NS, no matter how the shape of the NS is. Some other teachers accepted the NS to certain extent, particularly in relation to the standard of competencies and basic competencies. However, they said they need to adapt the NS in order to suit their students' needs, and their school's condition. They found that they have to use their creativity to modify the NS for the context of their teaching. Teachers also acknowledged that they need to lower the level of difficulty of the teaching objectives, and prepared teaching materials that are easy for their students. The majority of them affirmed that they combined the NS with their own school curriculum and advocated that it should be improved, and adapted it to be more contextual to their classroom. Still, other teachers implied that they were not in favour of the NS. They did not construct their KTSP based on the NS. They used other resources. They argued that they know their students better than others do, so they understand what kind of materials were needed.

Discussion

Using the concept of Bernstein's pedagogic device, it revealed that teachers have sufficient understanding of the distributive rules that the government has set in the NS. However, through their pedagogic discourse they have different attitudes in applying these rules into their classroom contexts. From their interaction with the NS as the distributive rules, most teachers viewed the NS as a comprehensive and informative reference; therefore they maintain their fidelity. Yet, few teachers from this fidelity group showed their adherence simply because they looked the NS as a must for teachers to refer to.

Some other teachers perceived that the NS as too wide-ranging; making it less specific. Therefore, as an act of recontextualizing, they adapt it to suit to the specific context of their classroom. This was evident in their pedagogic practice; such as lowering the level of difficulty of their teaching objectives, and applying methods appropriate with their students although these methods are not really compatible with CLT, the recommended approach in the NS for teaching EFL.

In terms of the incompatibility of some teachers with the NS, it has been anticipated that with this type of curriculum discourse, a 'potential discursive gap' (Bernstein, 1996) would likely to occur. In other words, this gap is the result of the teachers' pedagogic discourse in which they see the NS not applicable in their classroom

context, and that therefore they make their own school curriculum based on other resources.

Teachers' application of the evaluative rules was demonstrated in the three stands above. The fidelity group adopted the NS as it is as they perceived it as well-constructed. The adaptive group did modification to suit to their school context. The incompatible group did not refer their KTSP to the NS. Such different practices should become input for the government to revise the NS in order to be practical to all teachers.

Conclusion

Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 2000) theory of pedagogic device suggested that as policy implementation involves several actors at different level, there is always every possibility that the curriculum is not implemented as originally intended. Each actor has his/her own view and it influences how he / she implements it, hence the actualized curriculum. Central to this is that teachers should have capability to recontextualize the NS into their specific classroom context. Apparently, primary EFL teachers of South Sulawesi in Indonesia have adequate competence in translating the NS into their KTSP construction, yet they vary in their pedagogic practice.

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